

VZCZCXYZ0013
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHKA #0867/01 1491046
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 291046Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4159
INFO RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0329
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 7944
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1670
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 9110
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1712
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9922
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 0695
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 000867

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/29/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KGOV](#) [BG](#)
SUBJECT: NEW ARRESTS NET HIGH-PROFILE POLITICAL PLAYERS

Classified By: A/DCM D.C. McCullough. reason 1.4(d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. The latest wave of high-profile political detentions includes Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil, other Sheikh Hasina loyalists, and two reputedly corrupt former BNP ministers, Lutfozzaman Babar and Altaf Hussain Chowdhury. Meanwhile, the government has asked the high court to reopen two major corruption cases against Hasina. Perhaps sensing she is under siege, Hasina denounced the detentions as politically motivated and called for an end to the current "suffocating" situation. END SUMMARY.

THIRD MAJOR ARREST SWEEP
=====

¶2. (SBU) On May 28, Joint Forces troops, comprised of the military, paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion and police, made a series of high-profile detentions, the third such sweep since the January 11 declaration of a state of emergency. Among those detained were Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil, former BNP Home Minister Lutfozzaman

SIPDIS

Babar, former BNP Commerce Minister Altaf Hussain Chowdhury, former Awami League parliamentarian (and cousin of Awami League president Sheikh Hasina) Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, former BNP Parliament Whip Khandaker Delwar Hossain, businessman and former BNP MP M.A. Hashem, and former president of the Federation of Bangladeshi Chambers of Commerce and Industry Abdul Awal Mintoo. The Awami League Mayor of Sylhet, Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran, who was free on bail from a previous arrest in April, was also detained, as was BNP Mayor of Barisal Mujibur Rahman Sarwar.

¶3. (SBU) Jalil has regularly been in the press, calling for early elections and an end to the ban on political party activities. Most recently, echoing party president Sheikh Hasina, he criticized the Election Commission for its delay in selecting and implementing electoral reforms.

¶4. (SBU) Babar's detention followed renewed press commentary, and specific statements from Hasina, that his continued liberty belied the government's commitment to combat corruption. Altaf Hussain Chowdhury, Babar's inept predecessor at Home before moving over to Commerce, was also widely reputed to be corrupt. A retired air vice marshal, Chowdhury is only the second former military officer to be arrested (the first being the BNP's Hanan Shah three weeks

ago).

15. (C) Mintoo, a dual American-Bangladeshi national, was detained as he returned to Dhaka early this morning from a business trip to Bogra. According to his wife, someone identifying himself as "military intelligence" telephoned her to confirm his detention; in response to her question, he said Mintoo is being questioned because he knows intimately both Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina because of his prior affiliations with both political parties.

REACTION

16. (SBU) Thus far, there has been no public reaction from the comatose BNP, but Hasina denounced the detentions of her party members, accused the government of targeting her party and creating an unsustainable "suffocating situation," and stated she herself might now be arrested and beaten for speaking out to the press.

COMMENT: THE OTHER SHOE DROPS?

=====

17. (C) The first two waves of high-profile political detentions, in February and March, focused largely on the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, which is now crippled as a result. With the detentions of Jalil and Sheikh Selim, the last two Hasina loyalists on the Awami League Presidium are now behind bars. Other Presidium members known to oppose Hasina, such as Abdur Razzaque and Tofael Ahmed, are free in spite of corruption allegations against them that are generally viewed as more serious than those against Jalil and Kazi Zafarullah, another detained Hasina Presidium loyalist. Probably not coincidentally, the government yesterday asked the high court to reopen two cases that charge Hasina with taking kickbacks on the purchase during her administration of Mig-29 aircraft and a frigate from South Korea.

BUTENIS